



# **Losers Stick Together**

**KlingonEtiquette**

## Losers Stick Together by KlingonEtiquette

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Beverly Marsh & Richie Tozier Are Best Friends, Bisexual Bill Denbrough, Everybody Lives, Fix-It, Multi, Pennywise (IT) Being an Asshole, Richie Tozier is a Little Shit, Richie Tozier is a Mess, Stanley Uris Has OCD, Stanley Uris is So Done, Stanley goes to Derry with the rest of the Losers' Club, Mike Hanlon is an angel, Stanley knows more than he lets on

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Georgie Denbrough, Henry Bowers, Mike Hanlon, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

**Relationships:** Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough/Mike Hanlon/Audra Phillips, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Patricia Blum Uris/St Stanley Uris

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-10-25

**Updated:** 2019-11-27

**Packaged:** 2019-12-19 14:25:10

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence

**Chapters:** 5

**Words:** 6,246

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

After twenty-seven years and a phone call from Mike, the seven members of the Losers' Club gather in Derry to face the thing that terrorized them that summer in 1989.

In other words, this is a fix-it fic.

[Rating may change for language and violence.]

## 1. Chapter 1

As her taxi pulled up outside the restaurant, Beverly felt her heart claw its way into her throat. She felt sick, or at least halfway to getting sick right here on the pavement before she even had a chance to say hello. What would her friends think of her then, and why was she so worried what her friends would think when she hadn't even remembered their names for twenty-seven years? They might as well be strangers to each other now. After so long, what would there be to hold them together?

"Is there a password or are you going to let me go by?"

Gasping, Beverly whirled around. The face she saw in front of her... It was as much a stranger's face as a friend's, and yet Beverly's heart flooded with warmth at the sight.

"I... I'm sorry," she said. "I..."

"The new kid," he offered, smiling, and it all came rushing back. *Ben*, Beverly thought. *His name is Ben*. The new kid on the block, Ben from Sosh, Ben... Ben Hanscom. This was that Ben. *Her Ben*.

They fell into each other's arms, Beverly clinging to Ben as much as he was clinging to her. For the first time since Mike's phone call, she felt safe.

"Holy shit," said a voice behind them. "You guys look amazing. What the fuck happened to me?"

Beverly turned. *This* was someone she knew immediately—tall and pale with a mess of curly black hair, thick-rimmed glasses resting comfortably on the bridge of his nose. He was smiling, but he looked sadder than Beverly ever remembered seeing him that summer in '89.

"Hey, man," he said, leaning in to give Ben a hug and a pat on the back. "Richie."

It was impossible not to laugh.

Inside, Beverly drank in the sight of her old friends together. There

was Mike Hanlon, taller and more muscular than Beverly remembered, and Bill Denbrough, a streak of grey in his hair. Beverly's heart skipped a beat as Bill's eyes found hers, butterflies fluttering in her stomach like she was twelve years old again. She remembered feeling this way, didn't she? She remembered looking into eyes just like these and feeling this way. How easy it was, how strangely easy to fall back into that feeling like the arms of an old friend.

Of all of them, Eddie looked the most like he had that summer in '89. He was older now, taller and more mature, but he was the same Eddie he had always been. When he spoke, he even *sounded* the same.

Behind her, Beverly heard Richie mutter, "I can't fucking do this." Out loud, he said, "Hey, who's up for some shots?"

They did a round of shots, and then a second, and then Richie did the third round without his hands and said, "So wait, Eddie, you got married?"

"Yeah," Eddie said, a little defensively. "Why's that so fucking funny, dickhead?"

Richie's delighted smile reminded Beverly of the boy he used to be. "What, to, like, a woman?"

Eddie looked like he was trying not to commit a gruesome murder right here in the middle of a crowded Chinese restaurant. "Fuck you, bro," he said. "Fuck you."

"FUCK YOU!" Richie mimicked. Behind his cheer, Beverly thought she saw sadness. He was playing a part, almost, going through the motions as if he had no choice. *What could have happened in twenty-seven years?*

"What about you, Trashmouth?" asked Bill. "You married?"

Just like that, Beverly felt another piece of the puzzle settle into place. "There's no way Richie's married!" she said, laughing.

Richie looked as serious as he'd ever looked. "No, I got married."

“Richie, I don’t believe it.”

“You didn’t know I got married?” Was it Beverly’s imagination or did Richie sound hurt? Locking eyes with Eddie across the table, he said, “No, yeah, I got—Me and your mom are very, very happy right now.”

Bill’s composure snapped. He choked on his beer so violently, it got in his eyes.

It was easy after that, falling back into the way they were. And like she had then, Beverly found herself drawn to Bill, to his easy charm and handsome face, to the way he made her feel like she was someone worth knowing. She had missed that, even before she knew she was missing anything. For a moment, she forgot all about Tom and the bruises on her arms. She forgot how afraid she had been when she heard Mike’s voice for the first time in twenty-seven years. When they fell into conversation for the first time in twenty-seven years, it was comfortable. No, it was *comforting*. When she turned the conversation away from her husband, Bill didn’t ask questions, as if he already knew everything she wanted to say.

As the conversation softened, Richie’s voice cut through. “Wait. Let’s talk about the elephant *not* in the room.”

Everyone could see where this was going, and even Beverly found herself fighting off a smile.

“Ben, what the *fuck*, man?”

Blushing, Ben ducked his head, and Beverly realized she liked the way he looked when he blushed. Eddie gave Ben a once-over and an appreciative nod and, despite her protests to leave him alone and stop embarrassing him, Beverly couldn’t help but do the same. Ben was, as Richie so delicately put it, gorgeous.

And then Ben said something that froze everyone in their tracks: “Is Stanley coming or what?”

Richie was the first to break the silence that followed, murmuring, “Stanley... Stan Uris...”

“Stan Urine,” Bill said, as if it was a revelation.

“Stanley Urine!” Richie rolled his eyes. “No, he’s—”

The sound of someone clearing their throat made Beverly jolt out of her seat, heart in her throat.

“He’s what?” asked Stanley Uris, looking decidedly less than amused. Then, breaking into a bright smile, he said, “It’s good to see you assholes, too.”

## 2. Chapter 2

### Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter warnings: Brief mention (very brief and with no details) of Stan's attempted suicide. Evil attack cookies. Lots of swearing.

From here on out, I'm not going to follow the canon so much. I've put Stan into the dinner scene and I'm going to have to get more creative to figure out how he fits into the rest of the story, which I'm actually looking forward to a lot.

As always, comments would be much appreciated—let me know what works, what doesn't, and what kind of things you'd like to see!

In the half hour after Stan arrived, they learned three important things. One, that he was happily married. Two, that he was an accountant. And three, that he had made an attempt on his life mere hours before flying to Derry. But when anyone tried to ask about the third, Stan deftly turned the conversation onto something else. He told them about his wife, Patricia, about his job as an accountant, about his birds and bird puzzles, and about the feeling that had hounded him wherever he went.

“Like I always knew something was missing.”

Bill tried to remember feeling like that, but he couldn't. Years and years—twenty-seven of them, to be exact—and he had never once felt like something was missing, not even when he'd tried and failed again and again and again to remember his childhood or the place he grew up. What made Stan any different?

“I can't explain what came over me, but I picked up that phone and I just felt...” His voice faltered and broke.

“Like you couldn't go on,” Mike finished. Stan nodded, curly hair falling into his eyes.

“Like I couldn’t go on. Yeah.”

Through gritted teeth, Richie said, “I threw up. When you called, I threw up. I don’t know why; I just got so nervous. But I’m okay now. I’m relieved to be here, actually, with all of you.”

“I crashed my car,” Eddie added.

Ben looked ill. “Man, I hear you. My heart was literally pounding right out of my chest.”

“I thought it was only me,” Beverly whispered.

Realization hit Bill. He knew what it was, this thing they all felt. “It was like pure f—” For the first time in twenty years, he stuttered. The harder he tried, the harder it was to say the word. He remembered this humiliation all too well.

“Fear,” Mike finished. “It’s fear.”

“Why do we all f-feel that way?” Bill dug his fingernails into his palms. “You remember something we don’t, don’t you, Mikey?”

Across the table, Stan shivered. “It’s back, isn’t it?” He was talking to himself, barely audible over the noise of the restaurant.

“M-Mi-Mikey?” Bill urged. Mike looked away.

“There’s something wrong with this town, feeding off of it like a parasite. You forgot because you left, but I never did. I stayed behind and I remember. I remember everything.”

Beverly gasped for breath. “Pennywise.” It wasn’t a question.

“It.” Stan’s hands curled into fists. “It.”

“Yeah. It... It’s back. We made a promise, remember? If It ever came back, we’d come back, too. We’d put a stop to it for good.”

A stinging pain seared across Bill’s palm, forcing him to look. He didn’t remember getting that scar, not at first, and then he did. He remembered the broken glass ripping through his flesh, drawing thick



rivulets of blood that ran down his fingers and onto the grass beneath his feet. He remembered the way it had burned as he gripped Richie's hand much too tight, clinging to the words of the oath. Now he wished he'd had the foresight to cling to the bonds of friendship before they started to fray.

"Shit," Richie muttered. His hands were shaking.

Before anyone else could say anything, the waitress came to put a bowl of fortune cookies on the table, and the tension broke with an audible sigh.

"Thank you," Beverly said, reaching for one. Richie followed her lead, then Mike, then Stan, then Ben, and finally Bill. Eddie simply shook his head when Beverly tried to offer the bowl to him.

"No way. No fucking way. Did you guys not hear my list of allergies?"

Richie snorted. "Allergies? Yeah, right. You don't have fucking allergies, dude. I think you read shit on the internet or your *wife* reads shit on the internet and you let it get to you. You're not going to die from one fortune cookie."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Eddie snapped. "No, really, Rich, you don't have a *fucking* clue what you're talking about. You wouldn't know what health and safety was if it bit you on the ass and—"

"Tempting, Eds... You offering, or—?"

"Oh, that is so not funny."

"It *is* funny," Richie insisted.

Everyone jumped at the sound of Stan's fortune cookie cracking open. "Finally," he said. "Some peace and quiet. Wait. This is weird."

"What is?" Eddie leaned over to look at the paper. "It's one word."

Stan set the paper down on the table. "It just says 'knows.'"

Heart pounding against his ribs, Bill fished out his own fortune. "Mine says 'hiding.'"

"You're," Ben said, laying his paper in front of him with shaking hands.

"The." Mike's eyes darted around the table.

Beverly's soft, terrified sigh pulled Bill back into himself. "It."

"I can't," Richie said, throwing his on the table. "I... Fuck this."

"I'll do it." Eddie picked up the cookie and opened it. "Fuck, Rich, you got 'secrets.'"

Bill's mouth tasted dry and bitter. "I think it says *'It knows the secrets you're hiding.'*"

As Bill saw Richie stand to leave, the remaining cookies in the bowl split open, oozing thick rivers of blood that sprouted grotesque wings, legs, and bodies. Bit by bit, those dismembered body parts sewed themselves together into horrifying creatures: a screaming baby's head, a one-winged bat-like creature, and perhaps worst of all, a single eyeball trailing what could have been nerves or tentacles behind it.

Without so much as a warning, the creatures jumped into an attack.

"This isn't real." Stan's voice trembled; he backed up against the wall. "This isn't real. This isn't real. This isn't real. This isn't real."

Bill felt Beverly's hand on his elbow, fingers tight enough to hurt.

"Shit!" Eddie jumped back, nearly falling into one of the fish tanks. The fish were floating, decomposing heads. "Fuck!"

"Eddie!" Richie called, his arms raised to protect his face. "Eddie!"

It was Mike who acted, grabbing a chair and bringing it down again, again, again on the writhing, crawling *things*. Shattered glass flew dangerously close to Bill's eyes. A few feet away, he heard Ben and Eddie shouting curses, desperately fending off wings, teeth and claws.

“Excuse me—is everything all right?” The hostess of the restaurant stood in the entryway.

*Shit, Bill thought. How the fuck do we explain this?*

Richie, it seemed, already knew the answer to that. “Yeah, we’re fine. Can we get the check?”

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter warnings: Mentions of Stan's suicide attempt (this chapter is his perspective, so it has to have a few, but once again they're brief and not very detailed); a fair amount of swearing.

"I don't want to talk about it, Richie," Stan said, eyes fixed on the road ahead as Richie drove them back to the inn.

"We don't have to talk," Richie replied. His hands never left the wheel, even when he cast Stan a sideways glance that asked, *Are you okay?* Stan didn't have an answer to that question, so he kept his mouth shut. If he said he was okay, he would be lying. He was so far from okay that he hardly remembered what okay felt like, but he couldn't tell Richie that, not after twenty-seven years of silence. But if he told the truth, opened the door and said he was too tired to be dishonest, he wondered if Richie wouldn't just slam that door back in his face. After all, Richie was lying to him now.

The view out the passenger side window wasn't very interesting, but it was better than wallowing in self-pity. Stan counted the buildings he recognized as they went by, almost surprised that they vastly outnumbered the new buildings. There was the house Stan had grown up in, and there was the temple he had gone to every Saturday, every holiday, every day he needed an escape. How many hours had he spent sitting in the old stairwell, pretending to read a book while people passed him by? It had never really been the quiet that kept Stan there, though that was part of it. No, he had stayed because he felt like he belonged. He had felt *safe* in the temple. The people who had passed him by were people he knew were like him, people he knew wouldn't call him names or accuse him of centuries-old crimes. Even facing his father's disappointment had felt safer than facing the town outside those doors.

They drove past the fairgrounds, too, and Stan saw Richie flinch, his eyes deliberately avoiding that awful, towering statue. He looked sick, Stan thought, and afraid. *It knows the secrets you're hiding.*

“What did that message mean?” Stan asked. “It knows our secrets, but... everyone has secrets.”

Outside the window, the Kissing Bridge rushed by. Stan saw Richie’s grip tighten on the steering wheel, knuckles turning white. But Richie only said, “Yeah. Guess so.”

Stan knew better than to push the matter. He knew Richie would never tell him, not like this, not when they were both upset. Besides, Stan wasn’t ready to be honest with Richie, either, and he couldn’t ask Richie to share a secret without offering up one of his own in exchange, so he kept his mouth shut and watched the Kissing Bridge disappear.

Just before the silence became unbearable, Richie said, “Fuck clowns, man.”

Stan laughed, though it was not a laugh so much as a sharp nasal exhale. “Is that what you’re afraid of, Richie?”

“You know it isn’t.”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Richie drummed his fingers on the wheel. “Hey, I’m... I’m glad you made it.”

Lost for words, Stan worried at the bandage under his left sleeve. He felt so many things at once, it was hard to put a name to any of it. He wanted to tell Richie he was glad to be here, too, but that was another lie. He wanted to be anywhere but here. After Mike called, Stan had lied and told his wife he was going to take a bath. It was technically the truth. Guilt clawed its way up his throat as he pictured the pain in her eyes when she saw him... when she saw what he wanted to do. She had stopped him, of course, and reminded him of another promise he had made: *I will never hurt you.*

It was a little late for that.

As Richie parked his car, Stan went inside to find Beverly, Ben, and Eddie sitting and talking in hushed voices.

"I'm glad he's here," Ben was saying. "That would have been a horrible way to say goodbye."

"His wife, too," Beverly sounded on the verge of tears. "To find him like that, in the bathtub..."

Those hushed voices fell silent when Beverly looked up and saw Stan hovering in the doorway. She wiped her sweaty palms on her jeans, downed the rest of her drink, and lit a cigarette with shaking hands.

"Stanley..." she murmured.

"How did you know?" he asked. Beverly's face went white. "I didn't tell you. I didn't tell anyone, not even Richie on the way over here, so how the hell do you know?"

Beverly set her jaw, taking a deep breath. "I saw it," she confessed. "I've seen all of us die every night since..."

"The Deadlights," Ben whispered. "Since you looked into the Deadlights. None of the rest of us did."

The sound of the door slamming shut made them jump, but it was only Richie. "The fuck did I walk in on?" he asked. It wasn't the sort of question that wanted an answer. "We die? Beverly, we *die*?"

"In my dreams," Beverly said. "Yes."

"Great. Fuck. That settles it. I'm leaving. For real. Eduardo?"

Eddie avoided eye contact. "I'm with Richie, guys. We should get out of here. If she's right about Stan, she's right about the rest of us and I'm not risking that."

"But Stan's *alive*," Beverly pointed out. "I wasn't right. Not entirely. I saw what he did, what would have happened to the rest of us if he'd succeeded, but... I don't know. It's just a feeling I have, like we can change things, but only if we stick together. We were together when we killed It the first time."

"Are you serious right now?" Eddie's voice was shrill and strained. "Are you fucking kidding me? Suppose we stay, right? What then?"

We stay, we fight, we die. It's my job to assess risk, you guys, and I don't like these odds. I really fucking don't. They're stacked *overwhelmingly* against us and I have a life to get back to."

Richie kicked at the carpet. "Mike says it comes back every twenty-seven years. Let's just kick the can down the road and take care of it then."

"Seriously? We'll be, like, seventy years old, asshole!" Eddie snapped. Flushed with embarrassment, Richie opened and closed his mouth, scrambling for something clever to throw back. He found nothing and Stan couldn't help rolling his eyes.

"It doesn't work like that," he said. "Beverly's right. You guys want to know what happened? You want to know why I let my wife stop me? Why I couldn't go through with it?"

Four pairs of eyes fixed on Stan. He resisted the urge to retreat.

"Remember the woman I kept seeing? Her face was all messed up and she had these... these teeth."

Richie pretended to gag. "Not hot."

"Beep beep, Richie," Eddie said.

"When she opened her mouth and bit me, I saw these glowing orbs. Three of them. Floating in this vast, disgusting cavern of a mouth, and I couldn't look away. And I... I was scared, I was hurt, but I couldn't close my eyes. I couldn't look away. No matter how hard I tried, I had to keep looking into those lights. Like I was a moth headed straight for an open flame, I just couldn't look away. The things I saw in those lights..."

"The Deadlights."

"Yeah. The Deadlights, Richie," Stan agreed. "Every night since then, I've seen us die, too. Every single one of us. And when I remembered who you were, I thought I'd be too scared to go back, too scared to finish what we started, so I thought I had to take myself off the board."

“What stopped you?” Eddie asked.

Stan shuddered. He felt small all of a sudden, exposed and afraid. This was a secret he had to tell them, one Stan knew would give Pennywise power over him if he didn’t choose to take that power away. That didn’t make it any easier.

“In one of my nightmares, I didn’t come. I went through with... with... and the six of you faced It without me.” He couldn’t meet Eddie’s eyes as he said the next part. “And you died, Eddie. It killed you.”

Before Eddie had a chance to panic, the door burst open and Mike came tumbling through, Bill close behind him. Stan’s heart raced a mile a minute, nearly hard enough to break his ribs, as Bill caught his breath in ragged gasps.

“M-M-Mikey showed me,” he panted. “I know how w-we defeat It.”

*No*, Stan thought. *You don’t.*

He wasn’t quite sure how he knew that.



## 4. Chapter 4

### Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry it took so long. I'll try to be faster with the next one.

After a restless night, Ben supposed he should have been thankful for the shock of falling through the trapdoor to the old clubhouse. It did a better job of waking him up than three cups of coffee and an ice cold shower. Picking himself up off the floor, he marveled at how little had changed. Twenty-seven years later, the clubhouse still looked almost exactly as it had that summer, from the hammock Richie and Eddie used to fight over to the pack of cigarettes Beverly had left behind on her last day in Derry. Even the box of nails was still there, hammer left hastily on the ground beside it. It was perfect, just as perfect as it had seemed in 1989. Just as *safe*.

"I'm okay!" Ben called up. "I found it!"

One by one, his friends climbed down in a cascade of dirt and fallen leaves. First Beverly, her hair the color of smoldering embers in the half-light. *Winter fire*, Ben remembered. Richie climbed down after Beverly, skipping the bottom half of the ladder entirely, and offered Eddie a helping hand despite protests of, "Hey, I'm not *that* short, dickhead!" Stan followed Eddie, casting a withering glare at Richie before standing next to Ben. Mike and Bill came down last, talking in hushed, secretive voices.

"Jesus," Richie muttered.

Eddie crouched down, retrieving an abandoned rubber ball and blowing off the dirt with a dry laugh.

Beverly picked up the old box of cigarettes and smiled.

Stan found an old can, shook it next to his ear, and pulled off the lid. "Hey, look at this," he said, showing them the contents. Ben remembered those shower caps like it was yesterday, Stan's thoughtful contribution to the clubhouse. He remembered how

matter-of-factly Stan had said, “*So you don’t get spiders in your hair while you’re down here,*” and warm fondness flooded his chest.

“Stan the Man,” Richie said softly. Ben couldn’t have said it any better himself.

“Can I see that?” Eddie held out his hand, rubber ball forgotten, and Stan passed him the shower caps. Eddie took one out, gave it a quizzical look, and stood on his toes to put it on Richie’s head.

“Dude, what the *fuck?*” Richie snapped, but Ben saw him fighting a smile. Richie didn’t take the cap off his head; Ben noticed that, too.

When the laughter and bickering died down, Mike explained why they were here. There was a way to stop It for good, some kind of ritual Mike had learned about piece by piece over the last twenty-seven years. It would kill It, Mike told them, but not without a sacrifice.

“I nominate Eddie.” Richie gave Eddie a devilish grin. “You’re little; you can—”

“Shut up, asshole,” Eddie muttered. “You’re not funny.”

“It’s not that kind of sacrifice,” Mike continued. “To perform the ritual, we need to sacrifice tokens—things that mean a lot to us, even if they don’t mean anything to anyone else. That’s why we’re here. I thought if you saw the place we used to spend time, the place we felt safe and together, it might help you remember and find your tokens.”

“Our secrets,” Beverly whispered. Despite the softness of her voice, she looked determined. Strands of short, red hair fell into her eyes and Ben remembered saying, *Your hair is beautiful, Beverly*. He remembered how she had smiled at that.

Mike put his hands in his pockets. “Yeah. Whatever you’re hiding, whatever It thinks It can use against you, will make itself known to you when you find your token... If you don’t know already.”

*My heart burns there, too*, Ben thought with a grimace. In his pocket, the wallet with Beverly’s signature seemed a thousand times heavier.

They split up. Eddie went in the direction of the pharmacy, Beverly went toward her father's apartment, Stan to his father's temple, Richie to the arcade, and Bill to his house and the sewer where his little brother had died. Mike went to the library and Ben found himself walking toward the school.

The halls were eerily empty as Ben wandered from room to room. He felt a familiar chill run up his spine as he passed his old locker, half expecting to see the old spray-painted insults that still burned behind his closed eyelids every night. It was clean. Shaking, Ben reached out to touch the cool metal; he thought he remembered hiding inside, and then the memory hit him in full. He *had* hidden in that locker. He had hidden from Beverly—no, from something that *looked* like Beverly—and he had never been more afraid in his life.

As the noise of the memory faded, Ben took the folded yearbook page from his wallet and held it up to the light. *This is it*, he thought. *This is my token.*

\*\*\*

Beverly was already at the inn when Ben returned. She had a postcard—the postcard—in her hands and a smile on her face, and Ben wanted to tell her again that she was beautiful. Instead, he sat next to her and said, “You okay?”

Beverly jumped. “I’m fine. It’s just... Everything’s been a little crazy.”

“Yeah,” Ben agreed. “I know. How much do you remember?”

She shrugged. “Not as much as I’d like. I remember being scared and I... I remember that day at the Quarry.”

Ben couldn’t help but wince. “Feel free to forget that one.”

Beverly laughed; it was the first genuine, unguarded laugh Ben had heard from her all day. “And this poem.” She held up the postcard. “I remember the boy who wrote it. Not who he was, exactly, but how he made me feel. Like I was the most extraordinary girl in the world. The more I think about it, the more I think I can almost remember him the way he was.”

Ben held his breath. Now that they were here, sitting together and laughing, Ben wondered if he should say something. He wondered if he should help Beverly remember that he was the one who had given her that postcard. He wondered whether he should tell her about the yearbook page, about how he had loved her for twenty-seven years, even before he remembered who she was.

But then Beverly said, “Bill,” and Ben’s heart sank.

“I...” He swallowed hard. “Bev, I should tell you—”

The door opened with a bang.

“Fuck this shit,” Richie said. He was holding something tightly in his fist, his expression unreadable beyond the mask of anger. “I’m leaving. Don’t fucking try to stop me. I’m done.”

He went upstairs, Ben and Beverly staring after him.

“I’ll talk to him,” Ben said. He thought he knew how. “Be right back.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Let me know what you think/what you want more of or less of next!

## 5. Chapter 5

### Summary for the Chapter:

Warnings: Language, Richie's internalized homophobia. Also a tiny warning for Richie's #1 panic response.

*Should I tell them, Richie?* Hard as he tried, Richie couldn't shake the echo in his mind, the clown's taunting song and the things it threatened to reveal. Sooner or later, Richie had always known the truth would come out. That came with the territory of having a secret, and the more Richie buried the secret, the more afraid he became of its inevitable escape.

Wentworth Tozier had gotten a job offer in California in early 1990, an opportunity he would have been insane to turn down, so his family packed up and moved out west, far away from Derry, Maine. In time, Richie had forgotten. The little things had been the first to go, those moments he would have eventually forgotten anyway. And then he'd started to forget the rest, his teachers, his neighbors, the friends he loved more than anything else in the world. He had forgotten it all piece by piece, right up until the day he woke and no longer remembered enough to realize something was missing.

And although Richie's childhood tormentors had become faceless, nameless, and obsolete, the shame never faded. Even now, at forty years old, Richie felt a sick, creeping feeling of humiliation when people tried to know him. Not the face he wore onstage, but *him*, the real Richie Tozier. Without remembering why, he had grown up with only one persistent, stinging thought: *No one can ever know.*

Except now Richie didn't have a choice. If he didn't tell his friends, then Pennywise would, and he sure as hell didn't want to find out what that confrontation would sound like. So he had two choices: tell his friends and save their lives or skip town and let them all die with his secret. He was ashamed of how badly he wanted to go with the second. *Everyone dies*, he thought, but he couldn't make himself leave.

By the door, Ben hovered like a raincloud, one hand resting idly on

the doorknob. He was nonthreatening, despite the fact that he could easily overpower Richie. He was gentle, concerned more than anything else. It made Richie want to punch something.

“Talk to me,” Ben was saying. He’d been saying it for nearly five minutes already and showed no sign of stopping. “Come on, man. Whatever it is, we can figure it out. Losers have to stick together, right?”

Richie felt sick. He swallowed hard against the bitter taste in his mouth. “You keep telling yourself that, buddy, but I’m going. Fuck this shit.” He didn’t move toward his bag, still lying on the bed.

“If you leave, you’ll die,” Ben said. He stepped into the room, closing the door behind him with a quiet click. “What could be so bad, Richie, that you’d rather die?”

The ground seemed to lurch, sending Richie stumbling. *This isn’t real*, he told himself. *This isn’t real. This isn’t real. This isn’t real.* And it wasn’t. It wasn’t real at all, because Ben was still steady on his own two feet as the room spun around Richie.

“Richie?” he asked, all furrowed brows and worried eyes.

Afraid he might throw up or, worse, start crying, Richie focused on the ugly wallpaper and the whirring of his own thoughts. He thought about what it had been like driving into Derry from the airport, how a strange, icy calm had settled over him as he drew nearer and nearer to the mouth of Hell. He thought about what it had been like to see Beverly and Ben, how he had hesitated as he watched them embrace, aware all of a sudden that he remembered a moment just like this. He remembered Beverly caught in the Deadlights, eyes milky in a slack-jawed face. He remembered how Ben had pleaded with her to wake up and, when all else failed, kissed her. He remembered that kiss bringing Beverly back from the brink of something much worse than death.

If anyone would understand, Richie thought Ben might.

“I saw Pennywise today,” Richie admitted. It wasn’t much, but it was a start. “He asked me to play a game with him. Street Fighter. Or...

uh, maybe Truth or Dare.”

“Truth or Dare...?”

Richie coughed, trying to clear his throat. His mouth felt like it was filled with sand. “Yeah, Truth or Dare. You know, because that was, like, the nightmare for a thirteen-year-old gay kid in Derry, Maine in the ‘80s, that everyone would figure it out and... and I was sick or something. I was so fucking scared you guys would figure it out, too—especially Eddie—and I...” Too late, Richie realized what he’d just said. *A thirteen-year-old gay kid in Derry, Maine.* He whispered an emphatic, “*Fuck.*”

The room spun faster and faster. All Richie knew was that he needed to get out of here *right fucking now*, so he pried the window open with shaking hands and climbed onto the fire escape, Ben following after him. He knew he couldn’t outrun Ben, but that wasn’t the plan. Not anymore. He just needed to get some air that didn’t smell like his grandma’s house and look at something that wasn’t ugly, floral wallpaper.

As soon as his feet touched down on the fire escape, he threw up. *Déjà vu*, he thought with a bitter laugh.

Ben was beside him in an instant, one hand on Richie’s shoulder, holding him steady.

“Shit,” Richie coughed. He fought off a second wave of nausea.

When the world stopped spinning, Ben was still there, and Richie didn’t know whether to laugh or scream or cry. When the nausea subsided and the panicked racing of his heart slowed down, Richie glanced up and realized Ben was *still* standing there, still looking at him like they were friends, like he *loved* Richie.

Finally, Ben said, “You aren’t sick, Richie.”

Richie took off his glasses, pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes, and took a deep breath through his nose. Ben’s hand moved to his back, rubbing it soothingly. Now that the panic and the anxiety had subsided, Richie felt... okay. He felt better than okay. He felt *good*.

“Shit,” he muttered, almost cheerfully.

Ben thumped him on the back. “You’re a hell of a lot of things, but you’re not sick.”

“I’m not?” Dozens of offhand comments about Eddie’s mom sprang to mind, none of which Richie felt comfortable repeating right now.

“Okay, fine, you’re a sick bastard. But that’s not why.”

Warmth bloomed in Richie’s chest. “Thanks, Ben.”

“So, are we hugging this out or what?” Ben held out his arms for a hug. A minute or two earlier and Richie would have refused; he would have refused without a second thought, certain that sweet, sincere Ben would start to warp and transform into a nightmare, like a clown or a statue with bats in its mouth, or even Henry Bowers.

Richie let Ben hug him. Hell, he hugged back. And as Ben’s arms wrapped around him, squeezing tightly, Richie felt tears roll down his cheeks. This time, he didn’t wipe them away. So what if he cried? Ben was crying, too, his breath trembling in Richie’s ear. Part of Richie wanted to stay here forever, even if it killed him. Another part of him still wanted to run away. He settled for extracting himself from Ben’s arms, climbing back through the window, and sitting at the foot of the bed. Ben followed, closing the window behind him.

The bed dipped as Ben sat next to Richie. For a moment, Richie was scared Ben would try to talk first, the way he always did, because Ben couldn’t bear to see someone in pain. But they sat in comfortable silence, a far cry from the agonizing quiet they had suffered through before. Everything Richie wanted to say, he knew went without saying. Gratitude didn’t cover the feeling he felt now, like his body was warm and light and *his* for the first time in... well, ever. He felt like he belonged more than ever before, because he did belong. *He* belonged. Not the mask he wore. The mask was gone, shattered on the ground, and Richie still belonged. He was still a capital-L Loser, still part of the pack, the family they had found twenty-seven years ago.

What he managed to say was, “I’m not sick.” He hated how



incredulous he sounded.

Next to him, Ben let out a soft, surprised laugh. “No, you’re not.”

Richie could hardly wrap his mind around it. Had he really spent thirty years running away from this? This was it; this was the secret he was prepared to die for. But he didn’t want to die for it anymore. He had lived a lifetime afraid that, if he told the truth, the people he loved would come to hate him more than he hated himself. But here he was and here Ben was. Ben knew Richie’s secret, the one Pennywise had called *dirty*, and he didn’t hate him for it. If anything, it made their friendship stronger. It made *Richie* stronger.

“I’m not sick,” Richie repeated, barely audible. More than that, he *believed* it.

Ben squeezed his shoulder. “If you still want to leave, you can leave, but... we love you. That isn’t going to change.”

A moment’s thought was all it took. If he stayed, he might die. If he left, he would without a doubt. A few minutes ago, he knew he would have chosen death. It didn’t matter, not when he couldn’t have the life he wanted to live. If he stayed in Derry, he might die. He understood that well enough, but if he stayed in Derry, there was a chance he might live.

For the first time in twenty-seven years, Richie wanted to take that chance.

“I’m staying,” he decided. “Let’s do this.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Sorry it took so long to update! Let me know what you all think about the latest and I’ll see you all next time with a chapter about Mike.